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ABSTRACT

Comparison of company practices regarding continuing training of employees shows great diversity among the 15 European Union member states. In 11 countries, over 70 percent of companies are "training involved" (TICs). South European countries have a low percentage of TICs; the proportion of TICs in north European countries is over 80 percent. The proportion of companies offering training sessions is greater than that of those offering less formal training. As to formal training sessions, four groups of countries are distinguished in terms of employees' rates of access, average length of sessions, company size, percentage of companies conducting such sessions, company financial participation, and cost of training per trainee. The percentage of employees participating in a training session varies by proportion of TICs in the country. Comparing training session length with proportion of TICs, in countries with little training, average length of sessions is rather long, which is to the detriment of access; in TICs, rate of access is high but training is of short duration. With regard to other forms of training, three groups of countries emerge. In Denmark and Finland, self-training, lectures, and workshops play an important role. Austria, Germany, and the Netherlands mainly use inservice training. Ireland, the United Kingdom, Luxembourg, and Sweden show greater recourse to job rotation. The conclusion is that a European approach to lifelong learning remains to be created. (YLB)

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A European Approach to Lifelong Learning: Goals and Realities

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Training & Employment

A QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER FROM CEREQ AND ITS ASSOCIATED CENTRES

A EUROPEAN APPROACH TO LIFELONG LEARNING: GOALS AND REALITIES

In recent years, lifelong learning has become a subject of discussion within the European Union. This ambitious but sometimes controversial prospect must nonetheless take into account the present situation in each country and in fact, the comparison of company practices in the area of continuing training of employees brings out a great diversity among the present fifteen Member States.

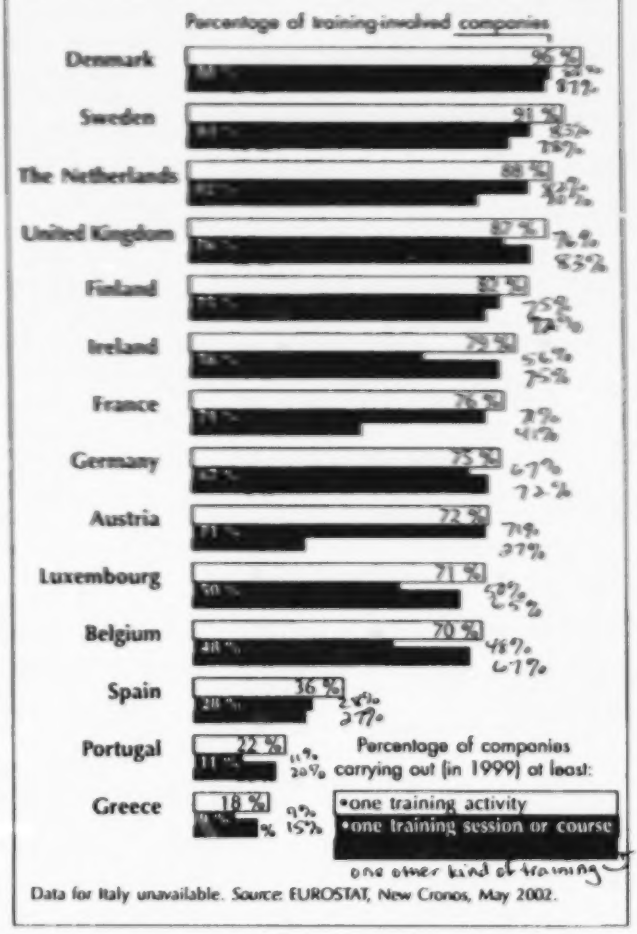
What is the relative situation of the different countries of the European Union with regard to continuing training? What are their similarities and differences, and with what consequences for employees? Insofar as company practices concerning the continuing education they finance for their employees are rooted in a variety of institutional strategies and cultural traditions, they allow us to assess the distances between the different European countries.

QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE DIFFERENCES

In eleven countries of the European Union, over 70 percent of the companies may be qualified as "training involved" on the basis of the fact that they carried out at least one training activity in 1999. These activities may consist of training sessions or courses but also less formalised practices such as self-training, in-service training, or conferences or seminars aimed at training, as well as organised job rotation and learning or quality-improvement groups (cf. Box page 4). Only the countries of southern Europe—Spain, Portugal and Greece—have a low percentage of such training-involved companies. Conversely, in the countries of northern Europe—Denmark, Sweden, The Netherlands, the United Kingdom, Finland—the proportion of training-involved companies is over 80 percent (see Fig. 1).

Throughout the Union, small companies (10-15 employees) are less involved in training than the others, although the disparities vary from one country to another. Where there is a high percentage of training-involved countries, this gap is relatively slight; thus, in Denmark and Sweden, the proportion of large companies (over 250 employees) involved in training is roughly identical to that of the small ones. On the other hand, it is 4.6 times greater in Portugal

Fig. 1 TRAINING-INVOLVED COMPANIES IN EUROPE



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and 7 times greater in Greece, while it is 1.4 times greater in France.

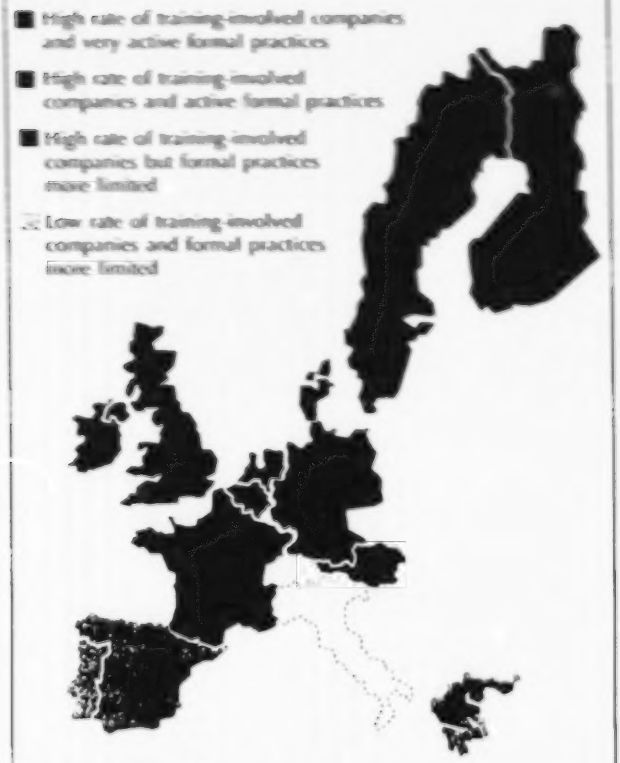
The relationship between formal training sessions and courses on the one hand and less formal training on the other takes three forms:

• *Predominance of training sessions.* For every 100 companies organising such training sessions, 38 organise other kinds of training in Austria and 58 in France. The Netherlands comes close to these two countries with a ratio of 100:85.

• *Complementarity of training sessions and other forms of training.* Thus, for every 100 companies organising formal sessions, 94 organise other kinds of training in Sweden, 96 in Finland and Spain, 99 in Denmark, 107 in Germany and 109 in the United Kingdom. These are the countries with the largest proportion of training-involved companies—with the exception of Spain, which shows that complementarity is not solely the prerogative of the "most training-involved countries".

• *Predominance of less formalised training.* For every 100 companies organising formal training sessions, 130 organise other kinds of training in Luxembourg, 134 in Ireland, 140 in Belgium, 170 in Greece and 182 in Portugal[1]. These are the countries with the smallest number of training-involved companies, but here too, one country offers an exception—Ireland ranks sixth for its proportion of training-involved companies.

Fig. 2 A EUROPEAN MAP OF TRAINING PRACTICES


High rate of training-involved companies and very active formal practices
High rate of training-involved companies and active formal practices
High rate of training-involved companies but formal practices more limited
Low rate of training-involved companies and formal practices more limited

Data for Italy unavailable.
Source: EUROSTAT, New Cronos, May 2002. Treatment: Céreq.

Overall, the proportion of companies offering training sessions is greater than that of companies offering less formal training activities.

TRAINING SESSIONS AND POLICIES

If we look more specifically at the formal training sessions, we may distinguish four broad groups of countries (see Fig. 2) in terms of employees' rates of access, the average length of the sessions, company size, the percentage of companies carrying out such sessions, company financial participation (in terms of the cost of the training sessions relative to labour costs) and the cost of the training per trainee.

A European map of company practices

• *Denmark, The Netherlands and the United Kingdom* are the EU countries where the employees' rate of access, the length of the training sessions (cf. Fig. 3) and the companies' financial participation in these programmes are the highest, regardless of company size. In the United Kingdom, the companies' financial participation is nonetheless greater in medium-sized structures (50-250 employees) and the cost per trainee is the lowest in Europe for the large companies but the highest for the medium-sized ones.

• *Finland, Sweden and Ireland* are situated in the top half of the EU countries in terms of training sessions. *France, Luxembourg and Belgium* might also be included in this group but company practices in these countries vary much more in function of their size.

• In *Spain, Portugal and Greece*, only a small proportion of employees have access to continuing training but the average length of the sessions is long. The companies' financial participation is lower than elsewhere and they generally privilege training sessions over other kinds of training. In addition, all of these variables show great heterogeneity in function of company size.

• In *Germany and Austria*, although the proportion of training-involved companies is clearly higher than that of the countries in the preceding group, the employees' rate of access to the training sessions is homogeneous but relatively small, the average length of the sessions is limited and the financial participation of the companies lower than that of most other countries of the Union.

Employee access to training sessions

The percentage of employees participating in a training session varies considerably from one country to another (cf. Fig. 3). It is the highest in the north of Europe—Sweden, Denmark, Finland—followed by the United Kingdom, France and The Netherlands. Spain, Portugal and Greece are the countries where the access rate is the lowest.

This rate obviously varies in function of the proportion of training-involved companies in the country. Thus, when Spanish or Portuguese employees work in such a company, they have the same access to training sessions as the whole of the Dutch employees.

The degree of each national system's involvement in training emerges when we compare the length of the training sessions and the proportion of training-involved companies.

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It appears that in the countries with "little" training (i.e., where the proportion of training-involved companies is fairly low), the average length of the sessions is rather long, to the detriment of access to training; in other words, relatively few employees are trained, but for longer periods of time. Conversely, in the "training-involved" countries, the rate of access to training sessions is high but they are of short duration. Denmark offers a very specific case with both a high rate of access and a long training period.

The "average training expectancy"—in other words, the average length of the training sessions multiplied by the rate of access—allows us to synthesise these observations by measuring the average number of training hours that an employee can hope to obtain in the course of a year. Three groups of countries thus emerge (cf. Fig. 4):

- the countries of the *northern Europe*, along with *France and Ireland*, where the average training expectancy is over 15 hours, and thus relatively high;
- *The Netherlands, the United Kingdom, Belgium, Luxembourg and Spain*, where it varies between 10 and 15 hours;
- *Portugal and Greece*, but also *Germany and Austria*, where it is less than 10 hours.

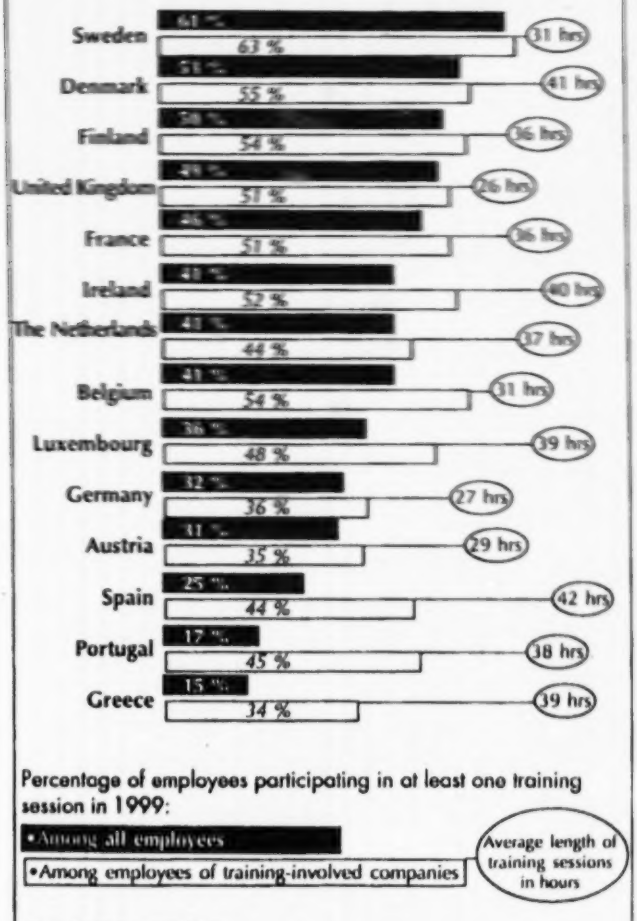
OTHER FORMS OF TRAINING

If we now turn to the other kinds of training, three groups of countries also emerge:

- In *Denmark and Finland*, self-training, lectures and workshops play an important role.
- *Austria, Germany and The Netherlands*, and to a lesser extent *Greece and Portugal*, mainly use in-service training along with lectures and seminars.
- *Ireland, the United Kingdom, Luxembourg and Sweden* show greater recourse to job rotation but also make considerable use of in-service training, lectures and workshops. Also included in this group are *Belgium, France and Spain*, which are more inclined to use in-service training, lectures and seminars but also job rotation, albeit to a lesser extent.

These distinctions probably stem from national features having to do with work organisation. In Austria, Germany and The Netherlands, in particular, where apprenticeship

Fig.3 EMPLOYEE ACCESS TO TRAINING SESSIONS



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Source: EUROSTAT, New Cronos, May 2002.

Fig.4 TRAINING EXPECTATIONS

Average number of hours of training sessions or courses which an employee can hope to obtain during one year
(The average length of training sessions multiplied by the rate of access for all employees combined.)
Denmark 22 hours
Sweden 18 hours
Finland 18 hours
France 17 hours
Ireland 17 hours
The Netherlands 15 hours
Luxembourg 14 hours
United Kingdom 13 heures
Belgium 13 hours
Spain 11 hours
Austria 9 hours
Germany 9 hours
Portugal 6 hours
Greece 6 hours

Data for Italy unavailable.
Source: EUROSTAT, New Cronos, May 2002.

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plays a major role in initial training, the companies have greater experience with in-service training and thus make more willing use of it. Job rotation, on the other hand, may be related to more standardised forms of work organisation. But such differences also reflect the way that individuals relate to training. Thus, in Denmark and Finland, self-training occupies a more important place than elsewhere.

CVTS-2: Survey on Continuing Training in Europe

The data presented in this study are drawn from the second European continuing training survey (CVTS-2) carried out at the initiative of EUROSTAT, the statistical office of the European Communities. This survey deals with continuing training partly or totally financed by the companies for their employees in 1999. It covers all the countries of the European Union and the candidate countries (nearly 25 countries in all). The French section was carried out by Céreq and the French Ministry of Labour's Department of Research and Statistics (Dares).

CVTS-2 is based on a standardised questionnaire submitted to private-sector companies with more than ten salaried employees, excluding health and agricultural activities. It permits the analysis of the forms of recourse to continuing training and provides quantitative information about trainees, the hourly volume of the training provided and the content and cost of the sessions.

The survey focuses above all on "sessions and courses" — vocational training in initiation given by teachers, university assistants or senior lecturers and organised by the companies or an outside provider for a predetermined period and according to the methods. It also provides information, however, on less formal activities such as self-training, participation in learning networks or informal training, the duration and financing of which are less well known. This article is based on data available to May 2002 and does not cover Italy.

These data shed light on the various patterns of recourse to training in the countries of the European Union. However, they do not cover all the possibilities in this field because they remain focused on company policies and do not, for example, include training directly financed by individuals and public schemes for employees or job seekers.

In any case, the companies play an essential role in continuing training systems. But given the divergent practices observed in this field, notably between small and large companies, we can only conclude that a European approach to lifelong learning remains to be created. A greater complementarity, between training sessions and courses on the one hand and other forms of continuing training on the other, could constitute an important factor in the elaboration of such an approach.

Michel Théry, Patrick Roussel
and Christian Zygmunt (Céreq)

Further reading

- "First survey of continuing vocational training in enterprises in candidate countries", *Statistics in focus, theme 3 (2/2002)*, EUROSTAT.
- "Continuing vocational training in enterprises in the European Union and Norway", *Statistics in focus, theme 3 (3/2002)*, EUROSTAT.
- "Costs and financing of continuing vocational training in enterprises in Europe", *Statistics in focus, theme 3 (8/2002)*, EUROSTAT.
- "Providers and fields of continuing vocational training in enterprises in Europe", *Statistics in focus, theme 3 (10/2002)*, EUROSTAT.

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